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## BOOK REVIEWS.

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*The Moral System of Shakespeare.* By RICHARD G. MOULTON. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.50.

WHATEVER Dr. Moulton writes is worthy of attention, but especially interesting and stimulating is his writing on dramatic subjects. His latest book, entitled *The Moral System of Shakespeare*, bears striking evidence of years of study in the classical and romantic drama. This new volume may not only serve as "a text-book of Shakespeare for students of literary clubs or scholastic institutions," but equally guide the general reader in the work of the great dramatist.

At first, we are not attracted by the title of the volume, but are set right by the first sentence of the Introduction, which explains that "the title is not intended to suggest that the man Shakespeare had formed in his mind a certain system of morals which he proceeded to put into his plays. . . . 'Shakespeare' is only used as a convenient name for the whole body of thirty-six dramas usually attributed to William Shakespeare. . . . The contents of these thirty-six plays make a world of their own, a world of personages, of incidents, of story. It is surely possible to survey this imaginary world from the same standpoint from which the moralist surveys the world of reality; the result of such a survey, put together with some degree of methodical order, will give us the moral system of the Shakespearean drama."

The volume is divided into three books. Book I, with the caption "Root Ideas of Shakespeare's Moral System," deals first with certain of the history plays and shows how the heroism of character founded on the breadth of human nature is "the heroism of the full soul, not consciously ambitious even of mortal greatness, yet adequate to every demand." Then are traced *wrong* and *retribution* through the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. The third chapter, entitled "Innocence and Pathos," attempts to show that retribution is not an invariable principle, but that the "moral system of Shakespeare gives full recognition to accident as well as retribution, as in *Romeo and Juliet*." Then wrong may find its restoration, as may be illustrated by *Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*.

Book II, treating of "Shakespeare's World in its Moral Complexity," was to us the most interesting section of the volume. In dealing with three of the Roman plays, Dr. Moulton begins his discussion by a comparison of the use of certain terms applied to ancient and modern life. Thus *Coriolanus* shows the ideal of the state; *Julius Caesar* shows in a later stage of development "the pure ideal of the state and the growing force of individuality;" and finally the conflict between these ideals is centered in the personality of Antonio himself in the play bearing his name. Two of the best chapters of the volume treat briefly the development of comedy and tragedy from the classical drama, and the difference between comedy as life in equilibrium and tragedy as equilibrium overthrown, are the converse of the other.

Book III passes to those forces of human life which are reflected in the drama—personal, individual will, restraints of will from within and from without. Thus we are introduced to *Intrigue*, "an expression of personal will in a very pronounced

form;" to *Irony*, "the conflict of one with other individual wills." The forces that tend to limit will, heredity and environment, are discussed in the chapter "The Momentum of Character and the Sway of Circumstance," then come the forces of vast movements of history to which character yields or rises superior; finally the forces of the supernatural as influencing life in Shakespearean drama.

The Appendix gives schemes of plot for each of the Shakespearean plays.

We have briefly outlined this new and comprehensive study of the life represented in Shakespeare's plays. Though we are every week confronted with a new work on Shakespeare, and still the master lives despite all these impediments, yet we are inclined to believe that Dr. Moulton's book has a place. Well planned, well written, definitely illustrated with analyses of the plays, it reaches conclusions drawn from a study of the plays themselves. We may wish for a different phraseology occasionally, but we must confess that the work leads only to a clearer understanding of the life and the structure of the plays, and makes the reader eager to know them better. In this volume of Dr. Moulton's at least one reader has found pleasure and profit, and can sincerely recommend it to all who wish to know better human nature as reflected in the greatest dramas of our literature.

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#### TWO RECENT HISTORIES OF AMERICAN LITERATURE.

*A History of American Literature.* By W. P. TRENT. New York: D. Appleton & Co. Pp. 598.

*A Reader's History of American Literature.* By THOMAS W. HIGGINSON AND H. W. BOYNTON. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. Pp. 350.

THE year just passed produced two noteworthy additions to the histories of American literature—one by Professor William P. Trent, of Columbia; the other by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, assisted by Henry W. Boynton. Professor Trent's book is one of the series of "Literatures of the World," edited by Edmund Gosse, each volume dealing with one of the great national literatures, and aiming to give "a uniform impression of its development, history, and character, and of its relations to previous and contemporary work." Mr. Higginson's work is based upon a series of lectures before the Lowell Institute, its name designing its primary purpose. *A Reader's History of American Literature.* Each book contains a valuable bibliography; that by Professor Trent is the more complete, as becomes the more pretentious volume. The bibliography compiled by Mr. Boynton is rather for the general reader or the less mature student.

After a careful comparison with the other, more ambitious histories of American literature, one feels that Professor Trent's book is the most scholarly work of its kind yet produced. The book is thoroughly sane in tone, careful in judgment, and free from the colossal provincialism that marks another history covering the same field. The author's words impress us that, while he has weighed well the best that has been written by literary historians and critics, he has written after a fresh, careful rereading of the authors discussed. The book is marked, too, by a gratifying air of reserve power. One gains, perhaps, Professor Trent's own aims and purposes from his criticism of Lowell, "who," he says, "was rather a talker about books, pouring from his